**Nu‘uanu Congregational Church, 2651 Pali Highway**

**United Church of Christ Honolulu, Hawai‘i 96817**

**Online Worship & Sermon June 7, 2020**

**TRINITY SUNDAY**

*(Have communion elements on hand prior to the start of worship.)*

PRELUDE Jieun Kim Newland

Sicilienne | Maria Theresia von Paradis (1759-1824)

ANNOUNCEMENTS Lori Yamashiro

CALL TO WORSHIP —based on Psalm 29

**The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the voice of the LORD is powerful;**

**the voice of the LORD is majestic. The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars.**

LORD, we hear your voice rumbling like thunder, speaking with power. We give you glory and honor and praise for you alone are worthy. Receive our worship as our response to your great voice.

**Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due God’s holy name!**

OPENING SENTENCES

God the Creator is as close as breath. However, God’s divine nature will always contain deep channels of power which we will experience most often as mystery and majesty. By God’s mighty Spirit creation, and all that is in it, is renewed and sustained. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, glory and love are revealed. This is the Trinity—the Sacred Community. Through the grace that has been offered us, let us seek God’s awesome presence. Let us invite Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit to come to us in our weakness, that we may be transformed.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

*Let us pray:*

How often we choose to lead our own lives with no regard for your presence in our lives. Yet, you are always there, patiently waiting for us to notice. You created our inmost being and desire to lead us and guide us, and yet, we want to try our own way first.

Help us to notice our self-absorption and our lack of trust. Help us to receive the mercy with which you constantly surround us. We know and believe that your ways are greater and so we give ourselves to you. With your help, we will watch for your working, we will notice your presence, and listen to your Spirit’s voice. Thank you for never giving up on us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

[*Let us take a moment of silence to reflect on what we have prayed.*]

Friends, hear the good news that comes to us from God: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Know that your lives have been made whole. From this time onward, let us live as forgiven and as forgiving people.

PASSING THE PEACE OF GOD

*Even while keeping our “social distance” from one another,*

*let us extend God’s peace to each other.*

HYMN *“I Love to Tell the Story”* Rachel and Deanna Wong

Lori Takeyama-Goshi, piano

A READING FROM HEBREW SCRIPTURE Paul and Paula Yamamoto

Genesis 1:1-2:4a *The First Story of Creation*

*1In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, 2the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. 3Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light. 4And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. 5God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.*

*6And God said, ‘Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.’ 7So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. 8God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.*

*9And God said, ‘Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.’ And it was so. 10God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. 11Then God said, ‘Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.’ And it was so. 12The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. 13And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.*

*14And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, 15and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.’ And it was so. 16God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. 17God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, 18to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.*

*20And God said, ‘Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.’ 21So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. 22God blessed them, saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.’ 23And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.*

*24And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.’ And it was so. 25God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.*

*26Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’   
27 So God created humankind in his image,  
   in the image of God he created them;  
   male and female he created them.   
28God blessed them, and God said to them,* *‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’ 29God said, ‘See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so. 31God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*

*2:1Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. 2And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. 3So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.*

*4These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.*

SERMON *“Responsible Response”* Pastor Jeannie Thompson

A little more than two weeks ago, as I read through the Scripture scheduled for this Sunday, I found myself lingering over the long passage we heard from Genesis. The creation of the world, the beauty of a garden was especially appealing.

During this time of face masks and social distancing, a garden spoke to me of a time before COVID-19 had swept through our lives, and especially our country. It has been a difficult time for all of us. What has been even harder was the fact that we—here in America—were coming up on the saddest of milestones: the loss of more than 100,000 of our fellow citizens to the pandemic.

Thus, to return to the creation story, to walk with God through the cosmos as God goes about separating dark from light, water from dry land, bringing forth flowers and trees, vegetables and fruits all across the land—this seemed like a safe and kindly place to stop and rest from our current situation. It seemed like a good place to meditate on the kindly mind and spirit of God that could conceive of and fashion such a place of sustenance, a place of nourishment.

And it is, too. It’s a great story.

As a matter of fact: as creation stories go, this story in Genesis is one of the most gentle of creation stories the world has ever known. Among other peoples, creation stories are often filled with pantheons of gods getting-up to all sorts of things. They make war, and struggle for supremacy over one another. They make human beings only to punish, swindle, or use as play-things. They embody all of the harmful, and the good aspects of the natural world, as well as all of the unique flaws that are common to human beings but which are expressed on cosmic levels.

Genesis is not like that. In our creation story, God walks onto the scene with a desire to create, to *make*, to infuse and fill with life. God looks into the void that is, and sees something more. God sees a world filled with light, color, and movement.

And so, God begins to establish the stars, the moon and the sun. The waters are separated and recede enough to reveal dry land. From this, God raises up the mountains, and spreads out meadows and fields of grain and grass. Forests and jungles rise from rich, dark earth with trees and vines laden with fruit of every kind.

It is a beautiful place, a place of abundance.

As I thought of the Garden of Eden, I was encouraged by all that my mind’s eye was seeing. This was a true reflection of God—the God who gives life and life eternal. Dwelling on this particular part of Scripture seemed to me to be a way for all of us to pause and rest and remember who God is, and what life with God is all about.

The story of the Garden of Eden was and is all about abundance. It is a place where God walked creating, and with each element of creation, God pauses to look over God’s work, and to pronounce it good. Each part of creation is inspected and found good—even the last, human beings.

Over the centuries, artists have depicted Eden as a place of extravagant beauty and abundance—flowers, fruits and vegetables spilling into the frame. Animals, too, all of them fat and sturdy-looking; content and at peace and at home.

In the midst of mourning the loss of more than 100,000 of our fellow Americans, stopping to remember God’s first impulse and gesture toward us—this Eden—seemed like a good thing. It seemed like a hopeful and necessary thing to remember how God had sought to focus our life together.

God had provided all that was necessary, and then had decided to create and share it with a species of sentient creatures: human beings. To these beings were given the run of the garden. Indeed, they were given “dominion” over all that had been created.

We were created to enjoy the garden, and rejoice in each our communion with it, with God, and with each other. Human beings were to live as easily and as carefree as all other creatures God had created and brought into Eden—*this* is what we were to remember and dwell on. We were to consider our *real* purpose in life, which was to experience the caring and creative nature of God, to enjoy it and give thanks for it.

The pandemic was an aberration from which we were going to be delivered with time, patience, and faithful caring of the world around us, and each other. The imagination and ingenuity that had brought forth all good things of the earth was also going to lead us back to wholeness, was going to drive healing back into our midst.

Then came the killing of George Floyd on the streets of Minneapolis. Yet another African American man was murdered at the hands of the police. Suddenly, the veneer of civility and tolerance that often covers a multitude of sins among us was shown to be a much thinner sham than we had even known it to be.

As we have seen: all across our country the reaction has been anguished and violent. Peaceful protest has often devolved into rock throwing, burning, and looting. Police in riot gear have committed themselves to combat and tear gas. The country began to look as if it was going to burn down around us.

As I turned my attention back to the sermon, I found I was overwhelmed. Quite frankly, I did not know what to do with everything I was seeing and hearing. And for the first time, I missed my recording deadline with Darwin. We are recording this on Thursday because for the first time in my life, I did not complete my sermon on time.

I decided and hoped that my time with the Bible Study group on Wednesday evening would be helpful…and it was.

First, and foremost, just being with the Bible Study group was a great experience. We are a lively bunch. We share our thoughts and insight, but we also laugh a lot—I really needed that. I needed to laugh. I needed to be reminded of joy.

However, something else happened. One person brought our attention to God’s instruction to the first human beings about their role in the garden. God blessed the first human beings and instructed them to *‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth…’* [v. 28], and then, they were instructed to “subdue” the earth. We were invited to “have dominion” over it.

Isn’t this what has gotten us into trouble in the first place?

Although we tried to find our way around it, we had to admit that our Bibles—in the various translations we had—all used about the same language. It was the language of possession and dominance.

Dominance is what we had seen on the news of late—police dominance and violence and the mob’s angry response matching them blow for blow. Dominance is the main part of the history of human beings—a long litany of one groups’ struggle to dominate another; another group’s struggle to throw off the chains of their oppressor—the chains of poverty, the chains of injustice, the chains of racism, the chains, the chains, the chains.

The Study Group acknowledged that the concept of “stewardship” was probably more appropriate—certainly more palatable—but we still could not overcome the stark reality of the language we had been given.

Then someone shared a different perspective: what if what was being given to human beings was the position of “being responsible” for the earth and all that God had made?

This still implied a kind of dominance. However, it tempered it with the notion that we are not the *owners* of the earth. Rather, we are to be the responsible party on the scene; we were given the position—not of processor of the land, but of caretaker. And so, Psalm 24 tells us:

*1 The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it,  
   the world, and those who live in it;   
2 for he has founded it on the seas,  
   and established it on the rivers.* [Psalm 24:1-2]

What, then, is our part? We are to *care* for creation….and each other. Humanity has been given the stewardship over God’s creation, we are looking after it for God’s sake. Ultimately, however, it is does not belong to us.

The reason humanity has been given dominion over God’s creation is because we have been made in the image of God—unlike the animal kingdom or the rest of God’s creation. The Bible does not teach that humans are on the same level as the animal kingdom, or the physical world that God has made. Only human beings have been made in the image of God, only we are responsible for taking care of God’s created order. Human beings have been made for eternity, the animals and the heavens and earth are only temporary. We are the ones charged with the proper upkeep of God’s creation. Therefore, the Bible encourages us to properly take care of that which belongs to God.

In this way, we are accountable to God for the way in which we treat the earth but also each other. We, too, are a part of God’s good creation. We, too, belong to God.

The pandemic and the brokenness of race relations is this country are a sad, even toxic mix that is causing even more hurt and broken-heartedness than the pandemic alone. As each new incident unfolds, I know it feels as if we are losing a bit more ground.

Yet, I find my thoughts going back to the early days of this ordeal—just a couple of months ago—as we hesitantly put on our masks, and began the new ritual of maintaining six feet of social distance between ourselves and others, and began to stay home in huge numbers.

I find myself looking for more examples of generosity in the community—people helping people; donating food, and money to those who are losing financial ground/who need help with the rent or groceries.

There are examples of this, too, and they make my heart glad—as I hope they do yours. I hope they also give you hope, because such things are hopeful. They are the examples of the goodliness that God was looking for, and found, in every item God created.

They are examples of how we took-up the challenge of being responsible for ourselves, and accountable to others—we took others’ health and well-being into consideration—and we were the better for it. We felt better about ourselves, and even in the midst of everything else, we had hope.

Those examples are vital to us now because they are our encouragement and guide for how to move forward. They are our foundation, but yes, there is more work to do, much more.

Our good news has already been proclaimed in the very dawn of creation. God proclaimed it first and most definitively: we have been pronounced good, and we have been blessed by our maker.

We do not own the earth as a procession that we can exploit without thought. Rather, we have been made responsible for it, and our thriving. Even better news is that we do not have to do any of this alone—God’s good creation still surrounds us, Christ has already shown us how deeply and dearly we are loved, and the Spirit lingers with us and has promised to never leave us, but to guide us and remind us of the glory that brought the world and all creation into being—and that we are a part of it—a part of the love of God.

Friends, the days of late have been dark and filled with fear. But do not lose heart. Believe in the powerful love that brought forth creation. Believe in the goodliness which has been proclaimed over you and me and all humankind. And allow yourself to believe that because God’s love is real and evident all around us, that hope is too, and that it lives in you, because it does.

Therefore, may you embrace God’s blessing and proclamation concerning you, and may you live with peace and commitment to live up to both of these good and goodly things.

May this be so. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit,

you form one communion as three persons.  
You create promise in our souls for new life.

You redeem us by forgiving our sin and making us new.

You sustain us in times of trial and call us forth as instruments of your peace.

For these good gifts, we are thankful.

May we know that, as three persons in one purpose,

you provide all that we could ever need or want.

With your blessing, you help us attain new heights of faith,

understanding and connection with others.

May we know you through communion with you as Three-in-One,

One God, who blesses us, unifies us, and calls us your blessed community.

Amen.

DOXOLOGY Russell Ishida, trumpet solo

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow;*

*Praise God all creatures here below;*

*Alleluia! Alleluia!*

*Praise God above, ye heavenly host;*

*Creator, Christ and Holy Ghost.*

*Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!*

**HOLY COMMUNION**

**Friends, today we have reflected together on the story of creation,**

**and have seen that even from the very beginning of all things,**

**God has constantly labored to create and offer to us**

**a world of goodly things:**

**a beautiful green earth filled with fruit and meat;**

**God’s own holy self as friend and divine parent.**

**This is God’s gift and our birthright:**

**love made real, nourishment and presence**

**that strengthens our bodies and our spirits.**

**Let us give thanks that God’s compassion for us has been,**

**and is steadfast, and filled with mercy that knows no end.**

**As we come to this holy feast of Communion,**

**let us also remember the story of the road to Emmaus:**

**two tired and downhearted disciples who thought to put away their sadness after having seen their friend and the Christ dishonored and crucified by worldly powers.**

**They came away lest they dared find joy and rekindle hope**

**in the story the women told them about the tomb being empty.**

**Like most of us, they found hope too difficult to receive…one more time.**

**So, they left Jerusalem, thinking to leave behind all they had loved and trusted.**

**They set out on the road**

**hoping, perhaps, to return to what they had known.**

**This is how the Risen Christ found them.**

**This is yet another moment when he chose to walk beside them**

**—talking, teaching, bringing back their courage,**

**reminding them of the joy of faith and trust.**

**He walked with them all day;**

**and when the day was gone,**

**he waited beside them—giving them the opportunity to invite him in.**

**When they did, he gladly sat down at the table with them;**

**Indeed, he became their host who blessed and broke the bread.**

**Offering it to them, he became, once again, their hope and their joy.**

**The host of that holy feast is the host at this meal, too.**

**If you will invite him to sit at your table Christ will, again, make it his own.**

**He will consecrate the bread;**

**He will bless the wine;**

**He will endow these good things with life, and life eternal.**

**So, together, let us offer these elements of bread and wine,**

**that Christ may bless them for our use.**

**Let us pray:**

**Loving God,**

**Send your Holy Spirit upon us,**

**and on this bread and wine.**

**Let the bread we break be true fellowship in the body of Christ,**

**Let the cup we share be true participation in the new covenant in his blood.**

**By your Spirit manifest in us the power of your redeeming love that we may be Christ for the world, serving in his name.**

**Through your son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit of your holy church, all glory and honor is yours, almighty God, now and forever. Amen.**

**BREAKING THE BREAD, POURING THE WINE**

**Through the broken bread we participate in the body of Christ.**

**Through the cup of blessing we participate in the new life Christ gives.**

**And let us pray the prayer Jesus taught us saying…**

THE LORD’S PRAYER Stan Chong

*As the prayer is being prayed in Hawaiian, please pray it silently to yourself*

*in whatever language you are moved to pray in.*

SHARING OF THE ELEMENTS

*“Let Us Be Bread”*

*(Please join in singing the refrain after you have received the elements.)*

**Let us be bread, blessed by the Lord,**

**broken and shared, life for the world.**

**Let us be wine, love freely poured.**

**Let us be one in the Lord.**

*After you have received the bread and wine, please*

*cover the elements of this holy meal, and let us give thanks together:*

**PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AFTER THE MEAL:**

**Thank you, merciful God, for the bounty of your creation—for the gifts of the field and vine that nourish our bodies, souls and hearts. Sustained by this meal and the assurance of your grace through our Lord, Jesus Christ, may our lives reflect your presence and may you be our priority. Amen.**

**BENEDICTION**

May the grace of Christ,

the love of God, and the Spirit’s joy surround you

as you walk in the light of the Lord. Amen.

POSTLUDE Jieun Kim Newland

Allegro from Symphony D | William Boyce (1711-1779)